



CARES and Head Start

A Partnership to Promote Quality

Nationally, more than half of children under the age of five are in nonparental care while their parents work. Research finds that teachers with bachelor's degrees and/or specialized training in child development provide young children with the best preparation to succeed in kindergarten and in the years beyond (Whitebook 2003).

Recognizing a Need

To address this need at a statewide level, First 5 California developed the Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Education Standards (CARES) program. Matching funds are provided to First 5 county commissions. The CARES program attempts to support local

programs by providing incentives for the professional development and retention of both family child-care providers and center-based teaching educators and directors. See *Bridges*, Fall 2007, Volume 12, Number 1, for a description of both the First 5 CARES program and the program funded by Assembly Bill (AB) 212. The AB 212 program is intended to provide support specifically to staff that work directly with young children in a program similar to state-subsidized programs administered by the California Department of Education, Child Development Division.

CARES' goal is to ensure quality child care and early learning programs for all children from birth to age five, regardless of the setting, by increasing the education, professional development, and retention of the early learning workforce. As First 5 California Deputy Director of Programs Sarah Neville-Morgan explains, "CARES is the first professional development program to support

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the full spectrum of the workforce—from family, friend, and neighbor caregivers to directors and those with higher degrees.” The program addresses the educational level, professional development, and retention of family childcare providers and center-based teaching staff and directors by providing incentives for them to stay in the field and improve their education.

Also recognizing the need for highly skilled staff, Head Start programs nationally require at least 50 percent of staff to have an AA degree. Reauthorization requirements raise the bar to a BA degree. Federal regulations require Head Start programs to support the staff in acquiring the requisite education and skills but specify no method for meeting this requirement. Programs are encouraged to use the national requirements to build their own professional development opportunities.

Staff members who desire to further their training and education frequently encounter numerous obstacles, particularly low access, lack of financing, and lack of time. Since the purpose of the CARES program is to help staff overcome these obstacles, the partnership between CARES and Head Start becomes one that smoothes the path. CARES enables many staff members and trainees to obtain an education they might not otherwise obtain.

Local Partnerships

CARES/Head Start partnerships in California have proliferated. In 2006–07, 44 counties in California held CARES contracts. In these partnerships:

- 39 counties provided stipends to eligible Head Start staff.
- 27 counties collaborated with a Head Start agency for outreach.
- 24 counties targeted outreach to Head Start staff.
- 21 county Head Start staff members are on the CARES advisory committee.
- 16 counties collaborated with Head Start agencies to offer training.
- 10 counties used Head Start as a resource for training.

The vast majority of CARES programs (39 of 44) provided stipends to Head Start staff. Stanislaus County Children and Families Commission commented that Head Start developed degree-completion goals for their staff that made collaboration with CARES advantageous.

Counties identified additional partnerships including the creation of a professional development tool kit (Santa Cruz County) and Head Start representation on the local child care and development planning council (Tehama County). Merced County described extensive collaborations, including CARES administrative staff’s attendance at Head Start parent meetings to disseminate information regarding the Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) track, as

well, as collaboration around the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and other training. Only one county participating in First 5 CARES indicated that it did not have a partnership with Head Start.

Touching Early Learning Professionals

In partnership with First 5 CARES, Santa Cruz County developed the Early Literacy Foundations (ELF) Initiative program. The initiative was designed to increase the skills of early childhood professionals and thereby increase the preliteracy skills of low-income children and English language learners. Students in ELF take classes through a program known as SEEDS (Sensitive, Encourage, Educate, Develop through doing, and Succeed).

The ELF Initiative is a three-year effort, jointly funded by First 5 California and First 5 Santa Cruz County, to build leadership skills among early learning professionals

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to promote strong literacy and language foundations for young children. Coupling First 5 California’s CARES goals to promote increased education and retention in the child development field with local literacy needs has changed the way environments and teachers support children’s learning. ELF program participants include staff from family child-care providers, Migrant Head Start Preschool, Head Start, Migrant Education Even Start, Teen Mom programs, General Child Care sites, and State Preschool programs.

Susan True, executive director of First 5 Santa Cruz County, says that by the end of this summer teachers in every migrant Head Start preschool, Head Start preschool, and many of the Early Head Start home visitors, will have received training and that she is “thrilled” with Head Start participation and the leadership.

The chart below shows that after one year of the ELF program, teachers/providers increased skill levels by developing stronger literacy skills in their programs.

Touching Families and Communities

In the San Bernardino County CARES program, Rebecca Carreon-Bailey developed another way of partnering with the Head Start program. She was looking for a facility to hold CARES Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) training sessions. Several Head Start administrators offered their facilities, and when the staff saw what her program was offering they asked if Head Start could partner with the CARES program and offer training for families whose children are enrolled in Head Start programs. Many families and their relatives provide more informal types of care in their communities. This makes them eligible for training and support services through the CARES FFN track. Today, after three and a half years, eight of the nine sites used for training are at Head Start facilities, and 35 to 40 percent of the participants are Head Start families—parents, adopted families, kinship caregivers, and extended families that meet the FFN criteria for training.

Percentage of Child Care Teachers and Providers Who Improved in Areas of Preliteracy Skills and Activities



LITERACY ENVIRONMENT
(Quality of book area, book selection, book use, writing material, and writing around the room) **98**

APPROACHES TO CHILDREN’S WRITING **89**

APPROACHES TO BOOK READING **85**



N=47

Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County Final Report, July 1, 2007–June 30, 2008.



Like San Bernardino County, the Riverside County CARES program has established an effective collaboration with Head Start. Kathy Alvarado, the program coordinator of the CARES/AB 212 programs in Riverside County says, "Because staff of the Riverside County Child Development Consortium know many of the people that work in Head Start, they were a natural source for us when we looked for sites for our FFN training. Our strongest partnership was in Lake Elsinore, where the Head Start center has a wonderful parent/community connection. They advertised our program, we spoke at their parent meetings, and they made two rooms available to us for our FFN trainings. Many of the Head Start parents are doing license-exempt child care so they are a natural fit for our FFN program. A couple of the people have gone on to get licensed as family child care providers and will be part of the CARES/AB 212 stipend program this year."

Many families who received this FFN training express deep appreciation for the training. In the west end region of San Bernardino County, a relative who cares for her three-year-old niece 25 hours a week reports, "I have learned many things during the Family, Friend, and Neighbor training. I learned how to control myself when the children upset me. I used to scream at them whenever they would not listen to me. With the trainings I learned to stop and listen to what they are saying. I am anxious to continue learning how to be a better babysitter to my niece and my own children."

In Ontario, California, a parent writes, "Being involved in the FFN program has greatly influenced my life for the

better. It has given me tools to help me provide improved parenting and be a stronger role model for other parents. Learning how to better handle behavioral problems and promoting social interactions has helped me at home tremendously. Getting down at eye level and talking with a child and using positive reinforcement, praise, and follow-through are some of the valuable tools that I have learned in this program."

An Unexpected Bonus

Clearly, the partnership between the CARES program and Head Start, whether staff, parents, or children, is beneficial to all. It supports the long-range philosophy of both, which is to support local programs by providing support and incentives to enhance the educational and professional development level and the retention of the early learning workforce. In addition, the programs find that in cooperation, they positively affect the lives of the families and caregivers of the children, as well as themselves, which is an unexpected bonus.

References

- First 5 Santa Cruz County Final Report: July 1, 2007–June 30, 2008.* 2008. San Jose, CA: Applied Survey Research.
- Whitebook, M. 2003. *Early education quality: Higher teacher qualifications for better learning environments—a review of the literature.* Berkeley, CA: Institute of Industrial Relations. <http://www.iir.berkeley.edu/csce/pdf/teacher.pdf>